

**AGENDA ITEM: 1a****HPO File No. 070601****SITE NAME:** Palace Hotel**SITE LOCATION:** 216 LaBranch Street (aka 1417-1419 Congress Avenue)**Owner:** 1417 Congress Partners, LTD.**Applicant:** Accent Signs

Time Frame	Date Accepted	35-day Consideration	70-day Action	90-day Limit
	June-5-2007	July-10-2007	August-14-2007	September-3-2007

**SITE INFORMATION:**

Tracts 1A and 2A, Block 25, SSBB, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The building on the site is a 3-story, brick veneer hotel building with metal balcony.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:**

On July 17, 2003 the HAHC granted the owner of the building a Certificate of Appropriateness to restore the facades of the building and construct a metal balcony. The applicant requests approval of a certificate of appropriateness for the following work:

Install a business sign for the ground floor business, Aladdin Bail Bonds, at the corner of LaBranch and Congress Streets; sign will be placed parallel to the canted corner entry of the building; sign will be one sided and will be suspended from the ceiling of the existing balcony; sign will be attached to ceiling by two rigid support brackets; sign will be rectangular in shape with scalloped corners; sign face will be constructed of routed aluminum 6" thick and aluminum sidewalls; sign will measure 12'-0" in length and 3'-5" in height; bottom of sign will be 9'-0" from sidewalk grade; Exterior surfaces of the sign will be painted to match the dark green color of the building with raised white acrylic letters 3/16" thick for the business name; Sign will be externally illuminated by spotlights mounted underneath the balcony from the inside of the balcony fascia.

**HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE:**

The Palace Hotel was designated as a landmark by City Council. The Palace Hotel, constructed in the Romanesque Revival style in 1903, is one of the most significant, surviving examples of a building constructed in that style in Second Ward. Although the brick building was constructed more for utilitarian purposes as a hotel, it exhibits distinctive architectural detailing more befitting its name. It is also one of the few surviving buildings of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Second Ward. Its unique architectural detailing indicates the possibility of its design being attributed to Olle J. Lorehn, a prominent architect of Houston, whose other works (most of which have been lost) featured much of the same detailing.

The Palace Hotel occupies the northwest corner of Congress Avenue and La Branch Streets in the eastern section of downtown Houston. The building, constructed in 1903, is located three blocks east and one block north of the 1911 Harris County Courthouse. In the surrounding area there are other buildings contemporary to the Palace: the Southern Drug Company warehouse, the De George Hotel, the Ben Milam Hotel and the Union Station. Union Station was recently adapted and incorporated into the design of the new downtown ball park (now called Minute Maid Field). The hotel is four blocks east of Houston's urban Main Street/Market Square Historic District (NR) (City of Houston).

There are currently five entrances to the building: one in the clipped southeast corner, one in each of the first and second bays of the south façade, a fourth in the fifth bay of the east façade and a fifth in the first bay of the north (rear) façade. None of the existing entry doors are original. The ground floor has regularly spaced cast iron columns that are only partially visible due to the unsympathetic alteration that filled the space between the columns with a brick wall punctuated with arched openings with fixed, square plate glass windows. The building is in fair condition. The condition of the roof is not known since it has not been inspected due to unsafe access.

**CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATNESS**

City of Houston

Planning and Development Department, Development Services

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The current owners, 1417 Congress Partners LTD rehabilitated the building utilizing the federal Investment Tax Credit program. An application has been submitted to have the building listed in the National Register of Historic Places as part of the rehabilitation and preservation plan. The following exterior work was submitted and approved by the Texas Historical Commission and the National Park Service: restoration of the historic storefront; restoration of the historic cast iron columns; reconstruction of the balcony; repair and stabilization of exterior brickwork; changes to Congress Avenue doors and La Branch doors, west façade and side courtyard, north façade and restoration of cast stone detailing and windows. On July 17, 2003 the HAHC granted the owner of the building a Certificate of Appropriateness to restore the facades of the building and construct a metal balcony as follows: Storefront - The existing storefront on the south and east facades is not historic and is considered an unsympathetic alteration with the exception of the cast iron columns that are inset into the new brickwork. This storefront is in good condition despite its non-historic character. Unsympathetic storefront will be removed. Cast iron columns will remain in place. A new storefront will be installed between each of the cast iron columns that is similar to historic photos from the 1970s. There will be a lower solid panel, a large display window type of glass, a horizontal cross member and single light transom. A central entry door will be inserted into the space in the clipped southeast corner. The wooden door will be centered, single glass with two sidelights. The sidelights will have lower wooden panels the same level as the storefront lower panels. The new ground floor storefront will be installed in each of the bays on the south façade, the clipped corner and the first bay of the east façade; Cast iron columns - There are six cast iron columns or pilasters on the south façade and one on the east façade. The columns are in fair to poor condition and are flanked by the new brick infill. Selective demolition on the interior reveals that the depth of the column flange is 1'-3<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>" deep and the cast iron is <sup>15</sup>/<sub>16</sub>" thick. The columns will be restored in situ and will be a prominent feature of the ground floor rehabilitation. The columns will be needle scaled, wire brushed to remove all loose paint, and then rinsed with alcohol. A prime coat of ZRC cold galvanizing zinc primer will be applied followed with an epoxy tie coat and a final topcoat or polyurethane; Balcony/Canopy - There is currently no balcony on the building. A recreation of the original balcony is proposed. Sanborn maps show a balcony along the south façade and a partial balcony on the east façade. This is supported by physical evidence on the building - there is a door on the second floor of the east façade that would have accessed the former balcony. There are also significant iron angles that once supported a porch/balcony structure. Since the historic photographs and Sanborn Maps do not lend enough information to restore the balcony, the proposed balcony is simple and without decorative elements so as not to be confused with a historic element. The proposed balcony will have a steel structure, with wooden (or Tendura) decking and an aluminum handrail. Single support poles without decorative capitals are proposed. The plinths or base surrounds will be cast metal of a simple design. All metal will be painted dark green or black; Exterior brickwork - The building currently has three different types of brick and brickwork. There are two types that are original to the building and a third that is part of the unsympathetic alteration of the ground floor. The original red-brown colored brick that was used as a veneer is visible on the east façade ground floor and the second and third floors of the east and south facades. This brick is laid up in a stretcher bond pattern with extremely thin mortar joints with a red-colored mortar. A brownish colored brick is used on the north and west facades (secondary elevations) and is laid up in an American or common bond pattern with five rows of stretchers to one row of headers. At the ground level of the east and south facades, the original openings between the cast iron columns is filled in with a red brick with wide mortar joints - this brickwork is not historic and is part of the unsympathetic alteration that was done in the late 1970s or 80s. The three examples of brickwork are in fair to good condition. The non-historic brick on the ground floor will be removed to expose the historic cast iron columns. The historic brick on the east and south facades will be gently cleaned with mild soap, soft brush and a garden hose. A mortar analysis will be conducted and any mortar repair work to the mortar will match the existing in color, strength and profile. Where new bricks are needed, they will be special ordered to match the existing. Brick on the secondary facades will be cleaned with a low-pressure water spray and any replacement bricks will be ordered to match the varied and muted color of these facades. Re-pointing, if necessary, will be done using new mortar that matches existing in color, profile and strength; Congress Avenue façade - exterior doors - The south façade (Congress Ave) has a non-historic entry door in each of the first two bays on the ground floor. The non-historic entry door in the arched opening of the first bay will be replaced with a wooden door with single glass. This door is proposed because there is no record of the historic door. The new door is understated and does try to appear historic and is compatible with the restored storefront; East (La Branch)

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## **CERTIFICATE OF APPROPRIATNESS**

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façade – exterior doors - There is a metal fire escape with an exit door located on each of the second and third floors - these doors were originally windows and were added later to accommodate the fire escape. The exit doors on the second and third floors will be restored to windows with 2/2 wooden sash windows the same type as the others on this facade. The exit door on the ground floor of the fifth bay will be a fire escape door, flush metal with panic hardware installed on the interior. The flat metal door will be painted a dark color and will inset into the arched opening, as is the current door, so as to be sensitive and encourage the door to 'disappear;' West façade and side courtyard - The west façade has only three windows on the third floor and one on the second floor that is sealed in. There is a large advertisement that covers much of these two upper floors. The original window openings will be maintained. A metal emergency exit stair will be installed along this façade to meet life-safety code. Paired, metal doors with single glass lights will be added to this façade at each level. This type of door design will not be interpreted as historic yet is sensitive to the historical nature of the building and necessary to meet fire code. The courtyard is proposed for the west façade to provide access to the upper floors and to allow for the new fire exit stair. There is a proposed secured gate south of and adjacent to the historic building along the south or Congress Avenue façade. This entry courtyard is proposed along this secondary facade to minimize the impact on the historic building and to retain as much of the interior space as possible. The side courtyard will be landscaped and greenery encouraged to grow on the new metal fences to soften the space; North façade - The north façade has a non-historic door at the ground floor level. There are four small window openings that correspond with the two small window openings on the east façade. On this façade, two are sealed with plywood and two have been bricked in. The second floor has four window openings. The third floor has five window openings. The window openings on this façade are either boarded up with plywood or bricked in. There is historic shutter hardware surrounding some of the windows on this façade. All window openings will be reopened and new 2/2, wooden sash windows installed. Designs of the windows will follow those of the primary facades. The non-historic door will be removed and the opening bricked in with brick of a similar color; Cast Stone detailing - The building is detailed with simulated stone decorative elements and simulated stone appliqué. The rusticated stone of the arched window hoods and keystones is an appliqué - it is a very thin plaster veneer built up on top of the brick veneer. This appliqué is in fair to poor condition and is cracked, missing or damaged in several places. Other simulated stone detailing such as the cornice bands, the decorative frame in the clipped corner and parapet, is more substantial and in good condition. Simulated stone will be tested when the mortar is tested. Repairs will be made with in-kind cementitious exterior plaster built up in place. Existing stone elements that do not need repair will be cleaned only using a soft brush, mild soap and garden hose; Windows - The windows of the second and third floors of the building are wooden sash, 2/2 with an arched, single light transom. On the second floor windows only, the lower sash is taller than the upper sash. The windows are in fair to poor condition: most of the wood is broken or rotten, many of the window sashes are warped and some of the window frames themselves have been damaged. There is no evidence of the original window hardware. The ground floor windows are fixed, single plate glass and not original to the building. Existing windows will be maintained and rehabilitated where possible. An extensive window survey is being conducted upon the request of the National Park Service that specifies which windows will be repaired and which replaced. New windows will be wooden replicas by Pella, Marvin, Anderson or a similar brand and will have insulated glass – these windows will be used only where necessary. Existing windows will be retrofitted with new glass sandwiched between laminate or with an insulated glass to provide a sound barrier.

**APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR ALTERATION:****Sec. 33-241. Same-Alteration, rehabilitation, restoration, and construction.**

(a) The HAHC shall issue a certificate of appropriateness for the alteration, rehabilitation, restoration, or construction of an exterior feature of (I) any landmark, (II) any building, structure, or object in an historic district, or (III) any building, structure, or object that is part of an archaeological site, upon finding that the application satisfies the following criteria, as applicable:

S D NA

S - satisfies D - does not satisfy NA - not applicable

- ☒ ☐ ☐ (1) The proposed activity must retain and preserve the historical character of the property;
- ☒ ☐ ☐ (2) The proposed activity must contribute to the continued availability of the property for a contemporary use;

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- ☒ ☐ ☐ (3) The proposed activity must recognize the building, structure, object or site as a product of its own time and avoid alterations that seek to create an earlier or later appearance;
- ☒ ☐ ☐ (4) The proposed activity must preserve the distinguishing qualities or character of the building, structure, object or site and its environment;
- ☒ ☐ ☐ (5) The proposed activity must maintain or replicate distinctive stylistic exterior features or examples of skilled craftsmanship that characterize the building, structure, object or site;
- ☒ ☐ ☐ (6) New materials to be used for any exterior feature must be compatible with the materials being replaced in composition, design, texture and other visual qualities;
- ☐ ☐ ☒ (7) The proposed replacement of missing exterior features, if any, should be based on an accurate duplication of features, substantiated by available historical, physical or pictorial evidence, where that evidence is available, rather than on conjectural designs or the availability of different architectural elements from other structures;
- ☒ ☐ ☐ (8) Proposed additions or alterations must be done in a manner that, if removed in the future, would leave unimpaired the essential form and integrity of the building, structure, object or site;
- ☒ ☐ ☐ (9) The proposed design for alterations or construction must not destroy significant historical, architectural or cultural material and must be compatible with the size, scale, material and character of the property and the area in which it is located;
- ☐ ☐ ☒ (10) The setback of any proposed construction or alteration must be compatible with existing setbacks along the blockface and facing blockface(s); and
- ☐ ☐ ☒ (11) The proposed activity will comply with any applicable deed restrictions.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** Approval of the certificate of appropriateness as requested by the applicant.

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**Site Location Map  
Not to Scale**



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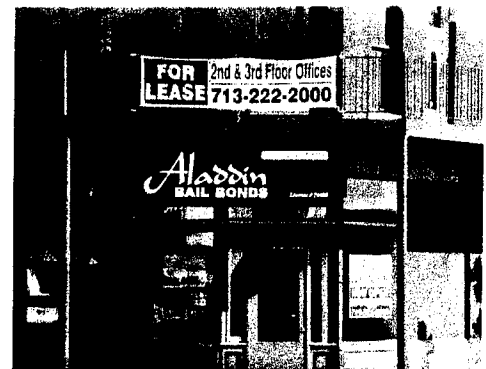
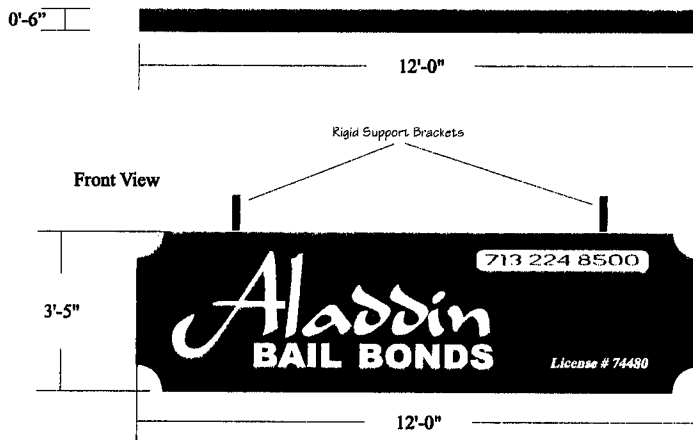
SITE LOCATION: 216 LaBranch Street (aka 1417-1419 Congress Avenue)

Proposed Alteration - (Sign)  
Not to Scale

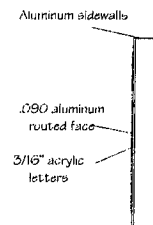
SCOPE OF WORK: 1/2" = 1' SCALE

- Fabricate and install (1) non illuminated single face sign w/ 3/16" thk. acrylic letters.
- All aluminum construction with painted exterior to match existing green on bldg.
- Vinyl Color \_\_\_\_\_

Top View



MIG WELDED ALL ALUMINUM  
FRAME STRUCTURE



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